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SUBJECT: ROMA ISSUES ROUND-UP FOR SLOVAKIA

REF: A. 03 BRATISLAVA 1178

[¶](#)B. BRATISLAVA 586

[¶](#)C. 05 BRATISLAVA 661

[¶](#)D. 05 BRATISLAVA 888

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PAST STERILIZATION OF ROMANI WOMEN - ISSUE REOPENED

[¶](#)1. (U) The August 14 release of the U.S. Helsinki Commission's report on sterilization of Romani women without informed consent in the Czech Republic and Slovakia has spurred a reaction in Slovakia. The report received media coverage on both television and radio. Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities Dusan Caplovic announced on August 17 that he will discuss the issue of past sterilization of Romani without consent with the Minister of Health. He said that he intends to review the government investigations (ref A) that took place in 2003.

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Klara Orgovanova, Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs, confirmed that the Slovak government has not made a final decision about possible compensation for victims of sterilization. In a print interview appearing on August 21, Orgovanova noted that it is within Caplovic's purview to follow the issue.

[¶](#)3. (SBU) In a meeting on August 16, the MFA Deputy Director for Human Rights said the report was "surprising" and that certain words were "offensive". She noted that investigations had been conducted and new laws had been enacted to ensure that informed consent is given, to allow greater access to one's own medical files, and to expand access to healthcare for Romani communities. The issue is not closed, she said, since victims have the right to file suit to receive compensation. However, to date no victim has received compensation. Two suits have gone to the European Court of Human Rights, several suits are in process in the Slovak courts, and several suits have been terminated for lack of cause.

ROMA HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL GARNERS HIGH LEVEL ATTENDANCE

[¶](#)4. (U) On August 4, Prime Minister Robert Fico spoke at the unveiling of a Roma Holocaust Memorial in Dunajska Streda, Slovakia to commemorate Porrajmos, the genocide of Roma during WWII. Labor and Social Affairs Minister Viera Tomanova, head of the President's office Milan Cic, Hungarian (and ethnic Romani) MEP Viktoria Mohacs, and others also made short remarks. While this event unveiled the first "Memorial" (i.e., free-standing structure) in honor of the Roma Holocaust, other commemorations and plaque unveilings have occurred for the past few years.

¶ 15. (SBU) While the commemoration included an exhibition of photographs of a Slovak-Romani artist, Jozef Ravasz, who also spoke at the event, there was a noticeable lack of Slovak Roma in attendance. No one from the Roma Plenipotentiary's Office made the hour-long drive to Dunajska Streda. Ladislav Richter, the Slovak-Romani organizer, had previously contested Klara Orgovanova for the position of Plenipotentiary. Richter and the NGOs that he is affiliated with are not well-respected by the young Romani activist crowd. Several Romani NGOs were unaware of, and apparently uninvited to, the event. Despite these behind-the-scenes issues, the event received positive attention in the mainstream Slovak press.

ROMA ACTIVISTS POSITIVE ABOUT MEETING WITH DPM CAPLOVIC

¶ 16. (U) On August 7, the New Roma Generation and the Milan Simecka Foundation issued a press release expressing their satisfaction after a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Dusan Caplovic. According to the statement, Caplovic understood the issues of the Romani community and promised a higher level of engagement. The meeting stemmed from a well-publicized press conference of Romani activists calling for the new government to keep its campaign promises (ref B). Shortly after that press conference, Caplovic publicly announced his intention to meet with the organizers and told the press that he intended to increase financial resources for the Romani community and minority cultures in general. We understand that Caplovic has formally requested all relevant ministries to come up with ideas for dealing with the issue of Roma integration.

¶ 17. (SBU) The August 7 press release was drafted and issued solely by the Romani NGOs. One trainer from the National Democratic Institute described the effort as demonstrating

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good initiative and strategy, but lacking in refinement and execution. The timing proved a few days too late to ride on the wave of media attention of the promises in the government program statement and the language used was overly complex and thus unlikely to be quoted by media outlets. (COMMENT. This shows a need for ongoing training in all fields for these promising young leaders. They are seeking funding for English language training from the British Embassy to be able to expand contacts and capture grants from abroad. END COMMENT.)

ROMA SWIMMING BAN RESCINDED

¶ 18. (U) In eastern Slovakia, the town council of Vysny Kazimir had issued a ban, later signed by the mayor, to prevent all Roma from going to a nearby pond used for fishing and swimming by local residents. The council said that Romani youths from a neighboring town were hassling others while there and were polluting the pond by swimming fully-clothed and riding their bicycles directly into it. Thanks to immediate pressure from the Roma Plenipotentiary's Office and local NGOs, the town council adopted a new resolution on August 15 which did not ban Roma but simply stated that anyone causing damage to the pond would be fined.

SOLUTION TO ROMA WALL IN SMALLER SETTING?

¶ 19. (U) About 20 residents of the southern Slovak town of Levice have complained about a neighboring housing complex which houses people evicted from other places for non-payment of rent, almost all of whom are Roma. The complaints include late-night noise and harassment by the children. On August 14, the daily newspaper SME quoted the mayor as saying, "Maybe we will separate them by a fence with an entrance path or establish a neighborhood police office in one of the

buildings."

¶10. (SBU) The mayor's statement hints that he is aware of the resolution to the proposed Presov - Stara Tehelna wall last year (refs C and D) and may be trying to seek a similar result, although it is unknown what type of "fence" he intends. At this point, the Embassy has not engaged but will follow the issue. This is a much smaller town with fewer Romani-related tensions than Presov. We will allow time first to see if the appropriate domestic entities, including the Plenipotentiary's Office and local NGOs, can apply the lessons learned from their previous experiences to ensure that any proposed solution is acceptable to both Roma and non-Roma residents.

THREAT AT ROMA CONSTRUCTION SITE BEING INVESTIGATED

¶11. (U) On August 18, the Slovak media reported that a bullet casing inside a partial skull had been left at a construction site of apartments expected to be occupied by Roma in the eastern Slovak village of Letanovce. Attached to the skull was a note directed to the mayor threatening that if he did not halt the construction, he would end up like the bones. The note also indicated that two activated grenades had been left at the site. Special technicians and trained service dogs found no trace of any explosives. The police have initiated a criminal investigation on the grounds of extortion and spreading alarm.

VALLEE